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A Review of "Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama" by Karen raber

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versial—corrective to critics such as Catherine Gallagher who have emphasized Behn's witty identifications between female playwright and prostitute.

The Theatre of Aphra Behn thus makes a different kind of contribution to Behn studies from *Behn's Afterlife*. If Spencer's study contributes to our historical understanding of the reception of women's writing in the eighteenth century, Hughes's work challenges our conceptions of the ideological underpinnings and overtones of Behn's comedy. For the record, I should note that I disagree with more than a few of the readings that Hughes offers. Willmore may have the attention span of a three-year old and the introspection of a *GQ* model, but Behn dedicated the second part of *The Rover* to the future James II and explicitly identified her exiled Cavalier with the exiled heir apparent. Behn's prefaces and dedications suggest a shrewd and widely read intellectual who was skilled in negotiating the complexities of Restoration politics. One wonders, then, what Hughes would make of her elegy on John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester or her preface to her translation of Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Cheats of the Pagan Priests*. The great virtue of Hughes's study is that it leads us to ask such questions about the shape of Behn's career, her theatrical and political alliances, and her significance for our understanding of the literature of the late seventeenth century. Like Spencer's *Afterlife*, it is a provocative study.

Karen Raber. *Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama*. Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2001. 338 pp. \$49.50 cloth. Review by JULIE D. CAMPBELL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY.

For anyone teaching or simply interested in closet dramas, Raber's book is an excellent resource. The study covers plays from the sixteenth-century through the Restoration, from those of Mary Sidney and her circle to those by John Milton and Katherine Philips. Raber especially provides good discussions of the contexts for these

plays, focusing on the relations of the playwrights to their political, cultural, and familial environments. For those familiar with the closet drama of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries, she covers much ground that has already been quite thoroughly examined in other scholarship; nonetheless, her strategy of putting male and female playwrights' voices in dialogue with each other is one that works well, allowing her to tease out a variety of salient observations about the texts and their contexts. Raber argues that "closet drama offered early modern writers of both sexes the opportunity to interrogate their culture's investment in drama and performance," but for women writers, she continues, it offered "a form of dramatic writing that allowed their participation in the discourses of dramatic representation" as well as provided a means through which women could explore their own "tenuous and marginal relationship to theatrical domains" (13-14). These are the main ideas upon which she elaborates in detail in *Dramatic Difference*.

In her introduction, Raber provides an overview of the history of closet drama. She suggests that although the genre's formation is often attributed to Philip Sidney's comment in the *Apology for Poetry* that English poets might profit from following Seneca's example, "the genre's formation owes more to a less specific, and more socially and literarily complex set of conditions"(25). Citing the suppression of "everyday spectacles of common life," such as the morality and mystery plays, stagings of liturgical drama, and folk plays, in favor of "more centralized, Protestant forms of entertainment," Raber asserts that "the English government under Elizabeth consolidated its hold on forms of representation just at the moment that performances at centralized theaters or inns became the preferred mode of cultural recreation"(25). She also notes that it was at this cultural moment that "a kind of *theorizing* of spectacle, staged speeches, and performance took the place of formerly abundant and varied theatrical pastimes"(25). Thus, she argues that Sidney's approval of *Gorboduc* should be read within the context of "his contemporaries' view of literary production to explain late-sixteenth-century interest in the Senecan closet

drama”(25-26). In addition to hypothesizing about the impetus behind the popularity of closet drama, Raber traces its development, pointing out references to it in Shakespeare’s plays, discussing the impact of the restriction of the licensing of actors upon household entertainments, and emphasizing the centrality of the aristocratic family to the genre.

In Chapter Two, Raber investigates the interaction of gender and class interests in Mary Sidney’s *Antonie*, Thomas Kyd’s *Cornelia*, Samuel Daniel’s *Cleopatra*, and Samuel Brandon’s *The vertuous Octavia*. This chapter contains four sections on the “domestic” and two sections on the “political” regarding Mary Sidney, her place in her family, her society, and her relation to her brother, as well as the influences of her translation upon the work of others. The two sections on the “political” are in many ways the most interesting. In them, Raber delves more deeply into *Antonie* than in the previous sections, considering representations of monarchy, especially relating to Elizabeth, and exploring the question, how does one successfully advise a monarch? She also considers the political impact of Sidney’s play in connection with its impressive publication and reprint record.

Raber continues to examine the issue of advising a monarch via plays in Chapter Three as she explores Greville’s penchant for “applying historical examples to the comprehension of contemporary political and social conditions” (117). In this chapter, Raber seeks to “reinsert Greville’s plays into their immediate historical situation and recover some of their interactions with their political environment” (116). Regarding *Mustapha*, she examines how late sixteenth-century “concerns about familial authority and affection, state-formation, and succession” inform the play, arguing that “the implications of Greville’s exploration of the family/state analogy prove devastating to any positive advisory role for his plays” (125).

Chapter Four is focused on the political tensions in *The Tragedy of Mariam*. Here, Raber examines the issue of “how genre is implicated in women’s unstable construction as domestic rather than political subjects” (150-51). She especially discusses the is-

sues surrounding women's speech and the idea that the only "safe" channel of communication is between a woman and her husband. Raber concludes that Cary's play "attacks patriarchy, including its more concentrated expression in patriarchal absolutism, as a flawed system" (164). While other critics have made similar observations about the play, Raber enhances her discussion of this idea by examining how the play provides a commentary on "perform[ing] subjection as it is described in the Elizabethan Homily on Matrimony" (153). Raber asserts that by the end of the play, Herod has trouble deciding if Mariam is guilty of "treason, of adultery, or simply of talking too much—because, of course, according to the doctrine that makes domestic and political patriarchy mirror images of one another, these crimes are indistinguishable" (170–71).

In Chapter Five, Raber discusses the plays of Margaret Cavendish, which she situates in dialogue with the work of Thomas Killigrew and that of her husband, William Cavendish. She compares Margaret Cavendish's and Killigrew's use of the woman warrior figure in relation to the historical backdrop of civil war. Raber ultimately suggests that in "her imagination of war Cavendish offers a radical revision of women's roles" but that in "her imagination of a peacetime world, she remains as conservative as Killigrew" (217). She also examines the ways in which William Cavendish's contributions of poems, songs, scenes, and dialogue informed Margaret's plays and comments extensively on their literary collaboration. She suggests that in her plays, "Cavendish recreates her husband's reputation. As the subject of her text, he is restored to power and made the authority he believed himself before the war" (235).

In her conclusion, Raber assesses the ways in which the women writers in her survey negotiate the cultural and political circumscriptions of their times, noting that the "implications of domesticity Sidney resists in the 1590s are solidified throughout the 1600s" (237). Raber ends her study with a discussion of the plays of Katherine Philips and John Milton, noting that the differences between how each conceives genre and gender "clarify closet drama's fate during and after the Restoration" (239).

In *Dramatic Difference*, Raber ultimately provides readers with a broad overview of the history of the closet drama in England, as well as a series of in-depth looks at authors and specific plays. Her interrogation of the domestic and political circumstances surrounding authorship, performance, and circulation of manuscripts or editions often rewards the reader with new insights into the issues of gender, class, and genre that she sets out to explore.

Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, eds. *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000. ix + 243 pp. + 5 illus. \$39.95. Review by MARLIN E. BLAINE, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON.

Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England presents twelve essays selected from the thirteenth biennial Renaissance conference at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, 15-17 October, 1998. Collections from past Dearborn conferences have been staples of seventeenth-century criticism since the late 1970s and have focused on individual authors such as Robert Herrick, John Donne, George Herbert, and Andrew Marvell, as well as on more general topics such as desire, wit, representations of women, and the English Civil Wars. Like previous collections from Dearborn, this one focuses mostly seventeenth-century writers, despite the use of the word "Renaissance" in its title. The book does have an article on Donne's poetry of the 1590s and brief treatments of sixteenth-century groups such as the Sidney circle and the Areopagus, but its predominant interest lies in the later Renaissance. It will be valuable reading for anyone interested in the question of how social relations—coteries, patronage networks, religious communities, and various other alliances and groupings of authors and readers—shaped literary production and consumption in the seventeenth-century.